

PACING IN MY CELL



POEMS BY

**ERIC
KING**

PACING IN MY CELL

Eric King



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CAN I LIVE?

One time can I touch this grass,
feel that breeze
that refuses to blow down these walls?
Can I be angry, break anything,
or be passionate?
Can I let that passion grow
like a poisonous vine
to be wrapped around my enemies' necks?
Can I live my anarchy, even if I'm flawed?
Can my rebel heart pump revolutionary blood the way
I feel it—may I feel it
without my leashes placed to reel me in?
Can I fight my daily oppression
without having to duck fist and spittle?
Can I live wild a little?
Can I be fucked up, cry sometimes, because convictions
don't erase fears?
Can I bruise my fist or color my body without a permission slip?
Can I speak without a ball and chain
shackled to my tongue?
Can I let loose my spirit,
let it flourish, watch it destroy?
Can I refuse to be submissive
to any State or movement
that puts tacks in my boots
to keep me constrained?
Can I get a sip of water?
If I'm forced to be stale
can I spit that water in every face
that's dipped my wings?

Can I sing
at the top of my lungs until my one neighbor in the entire unit
bangs on the wall?
Can I pretend I'm every atom, even the ones hurting me?
Can I just live without control,
love with all my heart,
insurrect with all my desire,
laugh with all my being,
cry with all my worries?
Can I be loved if I fuck up
and just do me?
Can I live just one time?

PACING IN MY CELL

I am pacing in my cell.
My skin is still on fire from the pepper spray
that I was bathed in eight days ago.
No clean clothes have been provided, no shower either.
I am scared because I don't understand the process,
or the noises, or the smells.
Don't understand why they aren't giving me a shower,
or a fucking towel, or fucking toothpaste.
My jaw still hurts; my eyes won't stop watering.
It hurts to swallow anything.
I am pacing my cell letting every pig know
that if they open this door I am attacking.
If they have the gall, I will provide everything else.
Eight days ago I charged into a group of COs,
fists swinging, refusing to let them disrespect my cellmate.
I didn't make it far—multiple cans emptied onto my face.
Punched, kneed, slammed down.
A knee on the back of my throat, a CO grabs my hair
and lifts up my face, while another pulls my hair back.
Eyes open
to ensure I get the full effect.
This is my second time in seg here. This time will last ten months.
I will be stuck in a cell with no lights,
served spoon-sized portions of food, be denied medical care.
I will meet some of my best friends and I will fall in love.
My spirit will enlarge and my rage at the system will deepen.
I received my property a full three weeks later.
My first shower came ten days after the spraying.
Skin still has burn spots.
I am pacing my cell, waiting.

J. SAUNDERS

J. Saunders beats elderly, defenseless men.
There isn't any need or reason to sugarcoat it
or spruce it up with bureaucratic jargon:
"Used proper force in direction of duty."
He took his bigoted fists and smashed them
into the face, ribs, and head of an elderly revolutionary
out of spite and fear and rage.
Saunders exploited a horrifying power dynamic
just like countless others in his position have done
and mauled his insecurities and lack of self-worth
into Herman, knowing there would be no fight back.
Lest Herman had a death wish.
Three- or four-on-one, just like the white gang members
these pigs wish they could openly be—get your licks in.
Decades in and still having to deal with this.
Centuries past and the same old violence.
Saunders kept his job, so clearly the state of NY sees
no problem with this.
He kept his breathing and bodily functions, which is
a certain shame.
How many blows were needed, how much pepper spray
dispensed to quell his body and spirit?
How much jealousy rest in Saunders's insect heart
knowing that Herman is more loved and respected in an hour
than he will be in his entire life?
The racism is real, the hate is real, our enemies
have names and addresses.
And if you beat our fathers and grandfathers,
then you'll have your name called,
and you will have to answer for your actions.

NOT EVERYONE MAKES IT

Not everyone makes it.

Not everyone sees a date on the calendar
as the second coming, as the first day of their life.

Some never get that resurrection.

We all do our part, and some of us get tied up.

Maybe protested, burned something, broke something,
freed something.

We acted according to our conscious and got hit,
and that fucking sucks, bad.

We have a privilege though, a privilege of having that date
the State fucked us and hurt us, and we will never get that
time back, and fuck it hurts! We have stains
that will never come clean and ink on us that will never dry.

Birthday parties and anniversaries and deaths.

Time doesn't go in reverse, and those moments can't be re-lived.
But we have a future outside.

Some of the people who followed their hearts won't make it out.
20, 30, 40, 50 years captive. Being treated as subhuman.
Being disregarded as not worthy of love or life or respect
or goddamn common decency.

They age and become old, yet they are still beaten and robbed
of the dignity, will, and spirit existence deserves.

The calendar mocks them,

and that gate will never show the compassion.

Some never make it out, and we need to remember them.

Every time we hit the streets, every protest we attend,
when Herman gets beat, we all need to feel those blows
and act accordingly.

Every time the pigs get away with murder we need to remember
that good, loving, brilliant, strong, compassionate people
walked their talk and put their lives on the line to end the barbarity
of the State, to raise their people up.

And they carry that struggle everyday and we *must* help
lighten that load always. Fight every day to open that gate.

Not with our will but with our action, with our bodies and minds.

SO MUCH MORE

We are so much more
than the suffering we absorb
as they beat us & keep us
from the people we adore.

We are so much more
than the poison which they pour
down our throats while we choke
and spit it to the floor.

We are so much more
than the labels that they force
with our make-up, fighting rapists
laugh as their teardrops form.

We are so much more
than the info they store
on our friends & on our movement
while they're kicking down our door.

We are so much more
than the lies that they bum
into our brains, try to train us,
but we will never learn.

A TERRIBLE PICTURE

I was arrested by two ugly shades
holding two ugly guns
pointed directly at my face
while wearing a backpack full of gasoline and paint thinner.

One to create, one to tear down.
Pockets full of shells and notes to remember.
My t-shirt was solid black.
My jeans hadn't been washed in weeks.

Calvin was patted and released—
he had to work for me that night.
The cops told me of the beatings and sexual assault
I had to look forward to that evening in holding
while handcuffed to a bench.
Stayed there for three days.
Ate one cinnamon bun.

Was wearing the red Pumas with the white laces
that Andrea had given me for surviving to be 25.
Achievements of all sizes.

I was arrested on September 16th, three years ago—
although it always feels
much longer.

The interrogator was
fuming after my laughing
subsided,
after they asked was
this an Occupy plot?

They had a warrant for my
body.
A warrant for my spit.

My mom cried on the
phone: *Your family saw
you all over the news!*
And they used a terrible picture!

ONE DAY

One day the sun will hug me,
welcome me back to earth.
Love will cauterize my wounded limbs.
I will have time to walk
and no boundaries to walk within.
I can touch the grass,
because I'm free to explore
or to ignore
anything that I will so chose.
Most of all though, I will be free
to play with all the silly bugs.

WE DON'T HAVE TO

We don't have to accept this world.
We don't have to be okay with the camo bros,
destroying lives and invading worlds.
We don't have to be okay with orange rapists
becoming leaders.
They don't have to be our leaders.
We don't have to accept Veterans Day.
We don't have to tiptoe around these clowns.
We don't have to salute flags and blue ribbons.
We don't have to tolerate predators.
We don't have to build fucking walls
and lock fucking cages.
We don't have to stand by while this happens.
We don't have to stay silent or submissive.
We don't have to forget our friends
or pretend they are doing just fine.
We don't have to ignore our mental issues
and act like we aren't on the brink.
We don't have to be okay with capitalism.
We don't have to fucking buy everything
they push down our throats until we're
gagging on goddamn receipts.
We don't have to laugh at rape jokes.
We don't have to quietly endure casual racism.
We don't have to accept locker room talk.
We don't have to bow down.
We don't have to close our eyes to what's happening.
We don't have to belong and fit in.
We don't have to devour our world.
We don't have to hate, and we don't have to stay angry.
We don't have to do anything that doesn't feel right.
We don't have to give our support to things that make
us feel uneasy or uncomfortable.
We don't have to.

NOT MY PRISON

This is not my home.
Not my tan clothes or
scratchy wool blanket.
My fucking chamber to rest
or my niche.
I am not an inmate.
That is a title bestowed
by monsters in blue clothes.
This is not my job,
and these are not my co-workers.
I have no boss.
Issues they have are not my problems.
These are not my shackles
or my constraints.
I didn't make, buy, or ask for any.
It is not my phobia of lost control
that built these cathedrals of despair.
This is not my home.
These are not my friends.
I have no desire to humanize
or fraternize.

BABY TEETH

Are we the State's baby teeth—
yanked and picked
from society's expanding mouth?
Stored for safekeeping
in tight little boxes.
Have we outgrown our storage?
Maybe we are the cavities
rotting out the core.
And when we are gone, the dentist
will cease hostilities.
Even when we are uprooted
there'll never be an end
to all the nerve damage.

SCANNED AND SORTED

Am I allowed to breathe?
Is that a punishable offense?
Am I allowed to feel?
Is that a shot?
Are my thoughts read
like my letters,
scanned and stored
to be used against me later?
My dreams dissected and distorted.
Tearing apart the meanings.
Digging for something,
anything.
Does my every firing neuron
have sinister intentions?
Yes.

YOGA POSES

I'll know I am free
when I am stretching out
feeling the wind on my face
doing all sorts of weird yoga poses,
and when I turn my head
to the left or the right
I won't see
a single goddamn fence
with a single goddamn piece
of razor wire that a worker in some factory
helped make to keep other people
locked in cages.
Stop making the fucking tools
to oppress other people.
Remember what color shirt you're wearing.
I'll know I'm free
when the color of shirt someone is wearing
will mean less to me
than the color of their shoelaces.

WHITE CROSSES ON MOUNTAINTOPS

I.

There's a cross across the road.
To me it looks more like an X
to mark the fucking spot
where they dump those who are forgot.
It doesn't give hope or inspire faith.
It's a tragedy and a human waste.
Those were people, with love and fear,
and now they're dust on the mountains,
which isn't where I'd want to be.
They didn't get released—
no compassionate freedom.
They will forever overlook the last place
they ever existed in human form.
The fences can't hold energy,
and dust can fly fucking free.
It's a reminder that they'd rather burn your dead body
Than set you free.

II.

I need a shovel.
I need a shovel to dig up the corpses
of those who never got to choose,
those who were burnt to a crisp,
those who can't and never could
say *get me from this place*.
I want to take a baseball bat
and smash that cross
that mocks the dead and pretends that forgiveness
is something they've obtained.
People die every day
still wrapped in society's chains.
It haunts me every night that I sit in front
of this fucking window.
It's the give and take, 'cause if you want the moon
then you have to deal with hell also.

FEELING FORGOTTEN FEELS WORSE THAN DYING

for Chelsea Manning

They take away your voice.
You lose touch with yourself.
If we aren't moving forward
do we even exist?
Instagram, Tinder—never made a hashtag.
Everyone is streetwalking
playing Pokemon Go.
I don't even have a phone.
It's so easy to feel alone.
Feeling forgotten feels worse
than dying.
They turned your story into a crime.
Tortured you for daring to exist.
Must have hurt those fuckers
to know so many people listen.
Flowers can grow in concrete—
can we grow in cells?
The easiest thing in the world
is to feel you've lost touch,
and it hurts so much.

STROBE LIGHT

For some reason, in my mind,
thinking this would be just fine.
Take a few years to relax & unwind.
I've never eaten well enough to
fret on what's not there.
Been ages since I've slept
peacefully anywhere.
Sadness is a cliff top I sometimes think,
and moods change as often as I blink.
Just like I miss the buses burning by.
I long for every star burning holes in the sky.
Passion is fleeting like a tornado.
Existence is brief but impacts everywhere
that it goes.
My memories are a strobe light
bouncing back and forth to rhyme,
thinking maybe I won't fuck it up this time.
My eyes have no reason to stay dry.
They remember every good-bye.
They burn with every good cry.
Thinking the door won't close
this time.

OH, THE LIFE OF A SNITCH

Oh, the life of a snitch.
You get caught with a ki
won't even do three.
That's one hell of a plea.
You're a snitch!

•

Number one on your conspiracy,
but you'd rather be free.
Smooth rolling in P.C.
"He was gonna tell on me!"
Sure he was—you're a snitch!

•

You sure like to talk and plan
then turn witness for the man.
Your life's more important.
Trust the community understands.
Hypocrite anarcho-snitch!

•

Swear "Fuck the cops 'til I die!"
Prison looks at you and smiles.
Whoops!—next day you're a C.I.
Where'd they hide the wire, guy?
Slimy recording snitch!

•

Free a thousand bunnies or two
but finger the entire crew.
Raise your hand and swear to speak the truth.
What'd they expect you to do?
Greasy Eco-snitch!

THEM BRONZE KEYS

Them bronze keys
o' they rattle.
Am I free
or starting battle?

Them slammed doors—
how they wake
my battered spirit
they try to break.

Them bronze keys
open my food tray—
guards watching hard,
inspecting how much I ate.

Them slammed doors
can hear from afar.
Do the doors know
how deeply they scar?

Them bronze keys—
why do you exist?
Separation creates pain,
and it's balled up in my fist.

WALK AWAY OR FIGHT

People say to be strong
but never say or mention
where to absorb strength from.
Is it strength that risks the hole
over a lack of vegetables?
Or reckless rebellion?
Maybe it's principle.
Facing our fears & embracing our weaknesses.
Maybe our greatest triumph
or fuckup.

Stand your ground—feel it quake.
Arms so brittle, legs so weak.
Struggle to recall the point of this.
Still willing to go for whatever the point is.
Forgotten what home smelt like.
Vividly recall what choking on fumes felt like.
Nothing is ever black and white.
Options are always more than
just walk away or fight.

ANGER OR HUNGER

Am I angry or hungry?
Starving and shaking.
Throw a punch
or take a bite?
Cook a meal
or start a fight?
In what world does
canned spoiled fruit and beans
count as a meal?
How hard does bread need to be
before it is a rock?
Do I fight for something more
or swallow my dignity and food?
I ate much better on the streets
when I was homeless & free.
Can I even complain?
Do I have ground to stand on
or thin air?

HOW DID ERIC MCDAVID HANDLE IT WHEN THE JUDGE SAID NINETEEN?

This is a feeling you can't escape.
It's an empty loneliness—I know it.
Me by myself despite a strong team.
Keep hoping that I'll wake from this.
How did McDavid handle it when the judge said
nineteen?
This is fear. I can feel it
eating through my stomach
like a starving lion lurking.
I float in the warm blood below
that puddles beneath my cold carcass.
Nothing I have to say, sadly,
is worth the struggle for a last breath.
When all there is to eat is poisonous plants
do you skip a meal or go for broke?
Vomiting up the last of my hopes.
Torn between defiance and defeat,
battle cries and fate's cruel jokes.
All of my heroes have records.
My internal infrastructure sparks riots.
When I wake the smoke has scattered,
and I have to face reality.
Survival is a must.
Acceptance then progress.
It hurts, though.

MALAWI BIRDS

I heard the Malawi birds.
They were bundled and stacked,
buried so deep,
but their voices reached so high.
Does their location
negate the warmth of their tears?
We can learn so much from suffering.
How long must our education persist?
Who will finally be the one
to rip the door off the cage?
Wings were meant to fly
not to die.

I REFUSE TO MAKE A HABIT

I refuse to make a habit
of being oppressed or oppressive,
to wear chains and pretend
they're bracelets.
Nothing orange is stylish.
These meals aren't gifts,
and these captors aren't our pals.
Don't give a fuck how their day is
or if they're breathing.
That pepper spray isn't cologne.
These beatings aren't for show.
The fire got put out in our cans,
but the power is in our hands
'til they rob the air we breathe.
I'll stand on the side of action.
Lessons learned today.
Mental weakness overcome today
will make a better me tomorrow.
For refusing to be broken
and refusing to make a habit
of being oppressed
or of being oppressive.
Such will keep me free
no matter what they bring.

ABOUT CAPITALISM

These walls,
silent as the dark & lost,
haunting as a ghost.

These walls
will fucking crush us all
if we ever give up hope.

These walls
steal inches by the hour,
pressing down & smashing joy.

These walls
will gladly break us all
if we ever give them the power.

These walls
snap shots of decaying minds,
cold and without mercy,
block out the sun in case it shines,
shocks out the dark in case it's night.

These walls
will kill us all
if we don't have the will to bear it.

BEING INSTITUTIONALIZED

There's no more bridges,
roses, flowers, or gardens.
Mutual friendship is foreign—
a dream like a soft mattress.
Territorial beasts without their homes.
No take out, just shake downs.
Felt to be disowned.
Only madness to look forward to.
Calendar days an abstract time.
By the time they've parted the gates
the whole world has changed.

MUTILATING SECONDS

One day the water that feeds
the grass

will wash away the stain
of captivity off me.

The clouds will open their arms in a
warm embrace.

Years of hurt and abstract existence
will be wiped clean.

I can't smell freedom, but one day
we all might.

Days can't be bought on the free market,
but they can be stolen at gunpoint.

Trees can't grow in a day, but we clean
out forests in mutilating seconds.

One day the water that feeds the world
will purify my soul.

LOOKING FORWARD

There's more to life than judgments
and gavels,
dogmas and logos, division and
squalor.

There's more to love than ego & control,
connections between beating hearts,
and the rain that feeds the soil.

Existence is observance,
and love can mean just learning.
Either we let go or we grow.

BATTLE-TESTED

for the Baltimore rebels

They couldn't take the heat.
Egos as fragile as their power structure.
Bones break, convictions never.
They think the lion's been put down.
More thorn in the paw.
They strike what they fear—
murderers and brutes. For our safety
our skulls are crunched.
You are not the victim.
You are a revolutionary.
Battle-tested joining good company.
Confused pig bastards
forgot that you're the shark,
and the blood is in the water.
Their violence validates further.
The struggle that forces the beast
to view its true self.
Reflections of hatred and spite.
Battle-tested, keep holding that mirror.

THE VIEW OUTSIDE

Blueberry colored lights, sky descending,
tilting my head up, the universe presents itself.
One more graceful night—dreams of worlds beyond.
Did I see a shooting star outside my wall?
No, it was a searchlight echoing the violence.
Reflective glares blind so harmoniously
off the razor wire, gently within my reach.
Steel asserts its might as it resurrects from hell.
To gain an air of freedom, to stand coffin deep.
Doors shriek in tune to keep me in (or keep them out?).
All my dreams of peace have deceived me.
Recreation in a cage. I have become a beast.
10,000 volts is so coolly welcoming.
The sparks purr at me
like a high I've never known. One touch & you're hooked.
Stars run away lest they be captured & sentenced.
Prisoners in a war—did I ever enlist?
Shine mimics beauty & holds a cold stare.
Shine entombs deadly, should you forget.
Uniforms may change, but society will ensure
that you will never be free from this burden.

GRAVEL

I can still see it there, under the haze of the street light.
No one in the world but me and this street sign.
Been walking so long my feet got engaged to the pavement.
My rubbery legs must stop. I am sleeping at 31st & Charlotte—
it's too perfect for a roof. I'll wear the stars as a blanket.
Brown eyes heavier than her words. I shoulda been stronger.
All I need is one good sleep—it can't hurt forever.
Two blocks down the road the now or later black power memorial.
Two shots up the road we'll be having another funeral.
Sirens sing me to sleep. I have nothing to be robbed of.
In the morning I'll be back where I goddamn started, comrades.
Only to have ice to eat. I'm anxious enough & too skinny,
feeling starving & weak. Will try the market dumpster this evening.
Cops laugh when they drive past, *Damn hobo drunkard*.
I know if I was black I'd probably no longer exist.
Guess I could try the collective. Worth a shot. I reckon they still
haven't forgiven me for trying to be Texan.
My legs are still, but my mind is a rollercoaster in motion.
Could try the eat spot—they never mind seeing me coming.
Tonight is nice to reconnect with the gravel that holds me.
I let someone in too deep despite everything my ethics told me.
Charlotte was my grandmother's name. Oh, how she'd scold me.
I'll box with the shadows until I beat down the memory.
My life is an explosion in reverse. Somehow, that's soothing.

ERIC KING, a vegan anarchist, was arrested and charged with an attempted firebombing of a government official's office in Kansas City, Missouri in September 2014 in the wake of the Ferguson Uprising. Eric was charged with throwing a hammer through a window of the building, followed by two lit Molotov cocktails. The criminal complaint states both incendiary devices failed to ignite. Eric was identified as a suspect by local police because he had previously come under suspicion for anti-government and anti-police graffiti.

On March 3, 2016, he accepted a non-cooperating plea agreement to one count of using "explosive materials to commit arson of property used in or affecting interstate commerce." On June 28, 2016, he was sentenced to ten years, the statutory minimum and maximum for the charge he plead guilty to. Eric has been detained at CCA Leavenworth (Kansas), FCI Florence (Colorado), and back again. His release date is June 2, 2023.

Write to Eric at:

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